

A Study of Methods for Anger Management According to Paṭhama Āghātaṭaṭivinaṭasutta

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze methods for anger management that had been recommended by the Buddha to be applied in order to subdue hatred as found in the Paṭhama Āghātaṭivinaṭasutta. In this article the five methods that can be found in the sutta have been analyzed one by one in orderly manner with supporting information taken from many other sources. The first two methods of extending loving kindness and compassion have been analytically presented followed by the third method of remaining unaffected by developing equanimity. The fourth method of trying to forget or disregard has been explained as the next applicable method for managing anger. The last method of application of consideration of one being the owner of one's Kamma has been explained as a method that can easily be applied by many ordinary people.

Keywords: Anger, Management, Methods, Loving kindness, Compassion, Equanimity, Kamma.

Introduction

Anger as we can normally perceive is something that brings about troubles and disasters in different scales. Nevertheless according to many modern psychological books anger is considered as a normal human emotion. It is considered to be neither good nor bad. Furthermore it is stated in modern psychology how people manage their anger can make the emotion either useful or harmful.² But when we study the teachings of the Buddha in the Tipitaka we can state that according to Buddhism anger is considered to be very unskillful and evil. Furthermore many evil and unskillful qualities are bound to be born of aversion.³ The gravity of the negativity of anger can be traced from the Channasutta where it is stated that an aversive person, his mind bound up, overcome with aversion, doesn't discern, as it actually is, what is of profit to himself, what is of profit to others, what is of profit to both. Aversion, makes a person blind, sightless, and ignorant. It brings about the cessation of

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² Judith peacock, **Anger Management**, (Minnesota: Life Matters, 2000), p. 4.

³ A. I. 201.

discernment, is conducive to trouble, and does not lead to Unbinding.⁴ Therefore it is strongly recommended in Buddhism that anger must be controlled and finally eliminated.⁵

Even though the assessment of the emotion of anger is not absolutely adverse in modern psychology the negative effect of uncontrolled anger is evident and real. Therefore many western psychologists have attempted to come up with theories and methods for anger management. Of those methods some methods are effective and some are not adequate enough to solve or manage anger.⁶ It is stated by psychologists that something more than what is already available in modern psychological findings is needed to deal with anger and anger related problems.⁷

There is the possibility of finding solutions to these problems from Buddhism. The Buddha preached many Suttas to instruct how to overcome negative mental aspects. Of those Suttas that are available in the Tipiṭaka, Āghātaṭṭapaṭivīṇayasutta⁸ (Sutta on Subduing Hatred) is a Sutta that directly concern about the overcoming of anger or hatred. The Buddha preached this Sutta while residing in Jetavana monastery in the city of Sāvattī. According to the sutta there are these five ways of removing resentment (Āghātaṭṭapaṭivīṇayā) by which a Bhikkhu should entirely remove (sabbaso paṭivīṇetabbo) resentment (āghāto) when it has arisen toward anyone.

The Method of Application of Loving Kindness

The first step is when one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should develop (bhāvetabbā) loving-kindness (mettā) for the person one resents; in this way one should remove the resentment toward that person.⁹ The method of developing loving kindness can be seen in many Suttas. According to the Vatthūpamasutta the practitioner abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as

⁴ A. I. 215.

⁵ A IV 94

⁶ John A. Romas, Manoj Sharma, **Practical Stress Management**, (Boston: Allyn And Bacon, 1995), p.127.

⁷ Dorothy Rowe, **Depression The Way Out of Your Prison**, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. vii.

⁸ A.III. 185.

⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit., p. 774.

to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.¹⁰

Mettā is derived from √ mid, to soften, to love. This means state of a friend. That which softens the mind, or friendly disposition is Mettā. Goodwill, benevolence, loving-kindness are suggested as the best renderings. Mettā is not carnal love or affection. The direct enemy of Mettā is hatred or ill will (Kodha), its indirect enemy is affection (Pema). Mettā embraces all beings without exception. The culmination of Mettā is the identification of oneself with all beings (Sabbattatā). Mettā is the sincere wish for the good and welfare of all. It discards ill will. Benevolent attitude is its chief characteristic.¹¹

The Buddha advised his disciples that others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you with what is true or what is false. They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way. They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way. They may address you with a mind of good-will or with inner hate. In any event, you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of good will (mettā), and with no inner hate (na dosantaro). We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with good will (mettasahagatena cetasā) and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will, abundant, expansive, immeasurable, and free from hostility (averena), free from ill will (abyāpajjena).¹² This exemplifies the extent that one is supposed to be tolerating and spreading loving kindness.

It is stressed in the Path of Purification that loving-kindness should be developed for the purpose of abandoning ill will.¹³ It is not possible to practice loving-kindness and feel anger simultaneously.¹⁴ Furthermore, it has been explained in the Manual of Abhidhamma that the opposite of the Pāli term Dosa which means hate or anger is Adosa. But the term adosa does not merely mean non-anger or non-hatred, but also goodwill, or benevolence, or loving-kindness (mettā).¹⁵

¹⁰ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p.120.

¹¹ Narada Mahathera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, Op.cit., p. 136.

¹² M. I. 122.

¹³ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, *The Path of Purification*, Op.cit., p. 109.

¹⁴ D. III. 247–248.

¹⁵ Narada Mahathera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, Op.cit., p. 32.

According to the Visuddhimagga, loving-kindness is characterized here as promoting the aspect of welfare. Its function is to prefer welfare. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing loveableness in beings. It succeeds when it makes ill will subside, and it fails when it produces selfish affection.¹⁶

It has been elucidated in the Numerical Discourses that a Bhikkhu might say thus: I have developed and cultivated the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness, made it my vehicle and basis, carried it out, consolidated it, and properly undertaken it, yet ill will still obsesses my mind. He should be told: Do not speak thus. It is impossible and inconceivable that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness, make it one's vehicle and basis, carry it out, consolidate it and properly undertake it, yet ill will could still obsess one's mind. There is no such possibility. For this is the escape from ill will, namely, the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness.¹⁷

The Buddha advised venerable Rahula to develop meditation on loving-kindness; for when one develops meditation on loving-kindness, any ill-will will be abandoned.¹⁸ The Buddha stated in the Mettasutta that frequently developing, making it a habit, a foundation and undertaking it thoroughly, the release of the mind in loving kindness could expect eight benefits. According to the sutta, the practitioner sleeps pleasantly, rises pleasantly, does not see evil dreams, becomes loveable to humans, and non-humans, the gods protect him, and fire, poison or weapons do not have an effect on him. If he does not penetrate further, is born in the world of Brahma. Furthermore it is stated that the practitioner who develops the thought of loving kindness limitlessly and thoughtfully sees his bonds diminish with the destruction of endearments.¹⁹

Furthermore a person who has a mind of good will is not fearful or he does not become afraid of anything easily. It is explained as I have a mind of good will when I resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. I have a mind of good will. I am one of those noble ones who have a mind of good will when they resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings.' Seeing in myself this mind of good will I felt even more undaunted about staying in the wilderness.²⁰

¹⁶ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, **The Path of Purification**, Op.cit., p. 311.

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit., p.868.

¹⁸ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit.,p. 435.

¹⁹ A. IV. 150.

²⁰ M. I. 16.

The Method of Application of Compassion

The second step is when one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should develop compassion (*karuṇā*) for the person one resents; in this way one should remove the resentment toward that person.²¹ The method of developing compassion can be seen in many suttas. According to the *Vatthūpamasutta* the practitioner abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with compassion, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.²²

Karuṇā, (√ *Kar*, to do, to make + *uṇā*) is that which makes the hearts of the good quiver when others are afflicted with sorrow. That which dissipates the sufferings of others is *Karuṇā*. The wish for the removal of sufferings of others is its chief characteristic. Its direct enemy is wickedness (*Himsā*) and its indirect enemy is grief (*Domanassa*). *Karuṇā* embraces sorrow-afflicted beings. It discards cruelty.²³ Compassion is characterized as promoting the aspect of allaying suffering. Its function resides in not bearing others' suffering. It is manifested as non-cruelty. Its proximate cause is to see helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It succeeds when it makes cruelty subside and it fails when it produces sorrow.²⁴

It has been elucidated in the *Numerical Discourses* that it is impossible and inconceivable that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by compassion make it one's vehicle and basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet the thought of harming could still obsess one's mind. The liberation of the mind by compassion is the escape from the thought of harming.²⁵ Furthermore the Buddha advised venerable *Rāhula* to develop meditation on compassion; for when one develops meditation on compassion, any cruelty will be abandoned.²⁶

²¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p. 774.

²² Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p.120.

²³ Narada Mahathera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, Op.cit., p. 136.

²⁴ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, *The Path of Purification*, Op.cit., p. 312.

²⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p.868.

²⁶ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p. 435.

The Method of Application of Equanimity

The third step is when one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should develop equanimity (*upekkhā*) toward the person one resents; in this way one should remove the resentment toward that person.²⁷ It has been elucidated how to develop equanimity in the *Indriyabhāvanāsutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya*. According to the *sutta*, when a *bhikkhu* sees a form with the eye, hears a sound with the ear, smells an odour with the nose, tastes a flavour with the tongue, touches a tangible with the body, cognizes a mind-object with the mind there arises in him what is agreeable, there arises what is disagreeable, there arises what is both agreeable and disagreeable. He understands thus: "There has arisen in me what is agreeable, there has arisen what is disagreeable, and there has arisen what is both agreeable and disagreeable. But that is conditioned, gross, dependently arisen; this is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, equanimity." The agreeable that arose, the disagreeable that arose, and the both agreeable and disagreeable that arose cease in him and equanimity is established.²⁸

Upekkhā, *Upa* = impartially, justly + *√ ikkh*, to see, to view, to look. *Upekkhā* is to view impartially, i.e., neither with attachment nor with aversion. It is the balanced state of mind. Its direct enemy is passion (*Rāga*), and its indirect enemy is unintelligent indifference. Attachment and aversion are eliminated by *Upekkhā*. Impartial attitude is its chief characteristic. Here *Upekkhā* does not mean mere neutral feeling, but a sterling virtue is implied thereby. Equanimity is the closest equivalent. That term, too, conveys only one aspect of *Upekkhā*. It is this *Upekkhā* that is elevated to a *Bojjhanga* (Enlightenment) factor. *Upekkhā* embraces all good and bad ones, loved and unloved ones, agreeable and disagreeable things, pleasure and pain and all such similar opposite pairs.²⁹

Equanimity has the equanimity of unknowing based on the home life as its near enemy, since both share in ignoring faults and virtues. Such unknowing has been described in the way beginning, "On seeing a visible object with the eye equanimity arises in the foolish infatuated ordinary man, in the untaught ordinary man who has not conquered his limitations, who has not conquered future *kamma* result, who is unperceiving of danger. Such equanimity as this does not surmount the visible object. Such equanimity as this is called equanimity

²⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p. 774.

²⁸ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p. 1150.

²⁹ Narada Mahathera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, Op.cit. p. 137.

based on the home life”³⁰. And greed and resentment, which are dissimilar to the similar unknowing, are its far enemies. Therefore equanimity must be practiced free from fear of that, for it is not possible to look on with equanimity and be inflamed with greed or be resentful simultaneously.³¹

Equanimity is characterized as promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings. Its function is to see equality in beings. It is manifested as the quieting of resentment and approval. Its proximate cause is seeing ownership of deeds kamma thus: “Beings are owners of their deeds. Whose is the choice by which they will become happy, or will get free from suffering, or will not fall away from the success they have reached?” It succeeds when it makes resentment and approval subside, and it fails when it produces the equanimity of unknowing, which is that worldly-minded indifference of ignorance based on the house life.³²

It has been elucidated in the Numerical Discourses that it is impossible and inconceivable that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by equanimity, make it one's vehicle and basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet lust could still obsess one's mind. The liberation of the mind by equanimity is the escape from lust.³³

The Buddha advised to develop meditation on equanimity for when one develops meditation on equanimity any aversion will be abandoned.³⁴ The method of developing equanimity can be seen in many Suttas. According to the Vatthūpamasutta the practitioner abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.³⁵

The Method of Application of Disregard

The fourth step is when one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should disregard (asati) the person one resents and pay no attention to him (amanasikāro). In this

³⁰ M. III. 219.

³¹ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, **The Path of Purification**, Op.cit. p. 313.

³² Ibid. p.312.

³³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit., p.868.

³⁴ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit., p. 435.

³⁵ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit., p.120.

way one should remove the resentment toward that person.³⁶ *Amanasikāro* is paying no attention. It is the opposite of *manasikāra* or paying attention. According to the manual of *abhidhamma* the literal meaning of the term *manasikāra* is ‘making in the mind’. Turning the mind towards the object is the chief characteristic of *Manasikāra*. It is like the rudder of a ship, which is indispensable to take her directly to her destination. Attention is the closest equivalent to *Manasikāra*, although the Pāli term does not fully connote the meaning attached to the English word from a strictly philosophical standpoint.³⁷ This method is not caring or forgetting what that particular individual has done to make the person angry.

Some techniques for applying the method of non-consideration can be learned from the *Dutiya Āghātapativinayasutta*³⁸ of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, which is attributed to Venerable *Saripuatta* as the preacher. It is stated that there are five ways of subduing hatred by which, when hatred arises in a monk, he should wipe it out completely. The *sutta* begins stating that there are five sorts of people for whom hatred should be subdued.

There is the case where some people are impure in their bodily behavior but pure in their verbal behavior (*aparissuddhakāyasamācāro hoti parisuddhavaśīsamācāro*). The method to overcome anger according to the *sutta* is that one should at that time pay no attention to the impurity of his bodily behavior, and instead pay attention to the purity of his verbal behavior just as when a monk who makes use of things that are thrown away sees a rag in the road, taking hold of it with his left foot and spreading it out with his right, he would tear off the sound part and go off with it. Thus the hatred for him should be subdued.

In the case where some people are impure in their verbal behavior but pure in their bodily behavior (*aparissuddhavaśīsamācāro hoti parisuddhakāyasamācāro*). It is instructed that one should at that time pay no attention to the impurity of his verbal behavior, instead pay attention to the purity of his bodily behavior just as when there is a pool overgrown with slime and water plants, and a person comes along, burning with heat, covered with sweat, exhausted, trembling, and thirsty. He would jump into the pool, part the slime and water plants with both hands, and then, cupping his hands, drink the water and go on his way. Thus the hatred for him should be subdued.

In a situation where some people are impure in their bodily behavior and verbal behavior, but who periodically experience mental clarity and calm

³⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p. 774.

³⁷ Narada Mahathera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, Op.cit., p.111.

³⁸ A. III. 186.

(*aparissuddhakāyasamācārohoti aparissuddha vacīsamācāro, labhati ca kālena kālaṃ cetaso vivaraṃ, cetaso pasādaṃ*). The technique to subdue hatred towards a person of this kind is that one should at that time pay no attention to the impurity of his bodily behavior and the impurity of his verbal behavior, instead pay attention to the fact that he periodically experiences mental clarity and calm just as when there is a little puddle in a cow's footprint, and a person comes along, burning with heat, covered with sweat, exhausted, trembling, and thirsty. The thought would occur to him, 'Here is this little puddle in a cow's footprint. If I tried to drink the water using my hand or cup, I would disturb it, stir it up, and make it unfit to drink. What if I get down on all fours and slurp it up like a cow, and then go on my way?' So he would get down on all fours, slurp up the water like a cow, and then go on his way. Thus the hatred for him should be subdued.

In another incident where some people are impure in their bodily behavior and verbal behavior, and who do not periodically experience mental clarity and calm (*aparissuddhakāyasamācāro hoti aparissuddha vacīsamācāro, na ca labhati kālena kālaṃ cetaso vivaraṃ, cetaso pasādaṃ*). There it is instructed that one should do what one can out of compassion, pity, and sympathy for him, thinking, 'O that this man should abandon wrong bodily conduct and develop right bodily conduct, abandon wrong verbal conduct and develop right verbal conduct, abandon wrong mental conduct and develop right mental conduct. Why is that? So that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he won't fall into the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, purgatory just as when there is a sick man in pain, seriously ill traveling along a road, far from the next village and far from the last, unable to get the food he needs, unable to get the medicine he needs, unable to get a suitable assistant, unable to get anyone to take him to human habitation. Now suppose another person were to see him coming along the road. He would do what he could out of compassion, pity, and sympathy for the man, thinking, 'O that this man should get the food he needs, the medicine he needs, a suitable assistant, someone to take him to human habitation. Why is that? So that he won't fall into ruin right here. Thus the hatred for him should be subdued.

In a situation where some people are pure in their bodily behavior and their verbal behavior, and who periodically experience mental clarity and calm (*parissuddhakāyasamācāro hoti parissuddhavaacīsamācāro, labhati ca kālena kālaṃ cetaso vivaraṃ, cetaso pasādaṃ*) it is advised that one should at that time pay attention to the purity of his bodily behavior, the purity of his verbal behavior, and to the fact that he periodically experiences mental clarity

and calm just as when there is a pool of clear water sweet, cool, and limpid, with gently sloping banks, and shaded on all sides by trees of many kinds and a person comes along, burning with heat, covered with sweat, exhausted, trembling, and thirsty. Having plunged into the pool, having bathed and drunk and come back out, he would sit down or lie down right there in the shade of the trees. Thus the hatred for him should be subdued. An entirely inspiring individual can make the mind grow serene.

The Method of Application of the Idea of the Ownership of Kamma

The fifth method is when one gives birth to hatred for an individual, one should apply the idea of the ownership of kamma (*kammassakatā*) to the person one resents thus: “This venerable one is the owner of his kamma (*kammassako*), the heir of his kamma (*kammadāyādo*); he has kamma as his origin (*kammayoni*), kamma as his relative (*kammabandhu*), kamma as his resort (*kammapaṭisarano*); he will be the heir of any kamma he does, good or bad (*yaṃ kammaṃ karissati kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā, tassa dāyādo bhavissati*).”³⁹

In this way by considering that this person who has done a bad deed that made me angry will get the result of his bad deed and he will repay it according to the law of the kamma, one should remove the resentment toward that person. This method seems like a very practical and applicable way when one is extremely angry and not in a mental state to wholeheartedly extend either loving kindness, or compassion or develop equanimity. Moreover when a person cannot forget or disregard the incident or the person that caused him to be angry the thought of letting the kamma be the force that repay that person’s behavior is deemed more appealing.

According to the *Milinda Paṇhā* “reviewing ownership of kamma,” is reflecting thus: “If you get angry with another person, what can you do? Can you destroy his virtuous behavior, etc.? Didn’t you come into this world on account of your own kamma and won’t you depart through your own kamma? Getting angry with another person is like taking hold of a hot flameless coal or an iron stake smeared with excrement in order to strike someone. If he gets angry with you, what can he do? Can he destroy your virtuous behavior, etc.? Didn’t he come into this world on account of his own kamma and won’t he depart through his own

³⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Op.cit., p 774.

kamma? Just like an offering of a cake that is refused, or like a fist full of dust thrown against the wind, his anger will remain with him."⁴⁰

These five methods are very practical and can be implemented in the daily life when a person gets to encounter a person or a group of people doing things that will make him angry. Then the unwanted actions and results that are adverse and harmful which are based on anger in human mind can be controlled more effectively in daily life. When one is able to control one's anger and deal with situations that cause anger he or she can live a better life without getting into psychological and physical troubles. Not only application of these methods to manage anger will benefit in the personal level but also the peace and harmony within the society and societies can also be expected when many people are controlling and managing their anger effectively.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that according to the Buddha's teachings as found in the Paṭhamā Āghātapāṭivīnayasutta the negative mental aspect of anger must be controlled by applying positive mental qualities such as loving kindness, compassion and equanimity. Furthermore, if the application of these positive mental aspects still fails to subdue hatred that has already arisen, the method of trying to forget or not paying attention to that particular hatred and the cause of hatred is advised by the Buddha to apply as an alternative. If all of above mentioned methods fail to subdue hatred the last method of applying the idea of owner of the Kamma which is considering the person who caused this anger will reap the result of his action can be applied to control and manage anger to a certain level. A person who can manage anger by applying one of these methods will live harmoniously in the society. moreover ,the society full of people who controls anger will be a peaceful society.

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⁴⁰ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**, Op.cit., p.1595.

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